

Temple Beth Rishon
Introduction to Judaism – Course Syllabus
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Class Meets Tuesday Evenings, 7pm to 8 pm

Class format (except first session):

- Discuss previous week's readings – 15 minutes
- Lecture on new topic – 30 minutes
- Discussion of lecture – 15 minutes

All required readings will be provided to you. Assigned readings for the next session will be distributed at the end of each class and/or sent by e-mail or fax if requested.

A recommended book list for additional reading will be distributed separately.

Feb. 7 Introduction, Overview of Jewish History

- Timeline of Jewish history vs. major events of world history
- Detailed discussion of ancient Jewish history (before 70 CE)
- What did we know? What surprises us?

Feb. 14 Rabbinic Judaism vs. Biblical Religion

- Comparison of major beliefs and practices
- Why Judaism changed – socio-political reasons
- Development of rabbinic literature – Talmud and Midrash

Feb. 22 No Class – school vacation

Feb. 28 Origins of Modern Judaism

- Emancipation in Western Europe
- Reform Movement in Germany and America
- Conservative Movement develops in America
- Orthodox reactions to Reform Judaism
- Comparison of movement beliefs and practices

Mar. 6 Jewish Conceptions of God

- God of the Bible – dual roles and personalities
- God of the Early Rabbis – “the merciful One”
- God of the Medieval Philosophers
- God of the Mystics (*Kabbalah*)
- God of the Enlightenment
- Modern Conceptions of God and covenant

Mar. 13 Judaism and Christianity

Jewish theories of Christian origins
Parallel development of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism
Christianity vs. Judaism in the Roman Empire
Christianity vs. Judaism in Europe – Western and Eastern
Christianity and Judaism in America – rivals and partners

Mar. 20 The Jewish Calendar

Biblical origin; lunar, solar and hybrid calendars
Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement)
Seasonal Festivals – Passover, *Shavuot* (Pentecost) and *Sukkot* (Booths)
“Minor” Holidays: *Chanukah*, *Tu B’shevat* and *Purim*

Mar. 27 The Jewish Life Cycle

Birth Rituals – male and female
Bar and *Bat Mitzvah* – coming of age
Marriage – ancient and modern
Death and Mourning

Apr. 3 Synagogue Rituals

Daily prayer services – basic components
Sabbath services – additions and subtractions
Festival services – what is added

Apr. 10 No Class – school vacation

Apr. 17 Home-based Rituals

Daily traditional practices
Sabbath customs
Holiday celebrations

Apr. 24 Holocaust and Theology

Where was God?
Determinism vs. Free Will

May 1 Our Relationship with Israel

Origins of Modern Zionism
American Responses to Zionism
American Support for Israel
Stresses in the relationship

May 8 Summary and Open Forum

Judaism: Religion, peoplehood or both?
What have we learned?
What questions remain?